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It's fall.

Paul Tukey, the lawn care guru from SafeLawns.org refers to this time of year as a gardening utopia – the time to plant just about anything! Nights are cool, days are warm, rain is generally plentiful – all these ingredients allow plants to get established before winter. This is also a time to work on your lawn. Chances are your lawn has suffered some damage due to the intense heat and lack of rain this summer. Well, fall is the perfect time to ‘heal’ your stressed lawn and get it on the mend for next spring!

Happy gardening,

Debbie Cook, Greenscapes Manager



Healing Your Stressed Lawn

Here are some steps to get your lawn healthy and thriving next spring:

1. Rake up dried grass – If there are patches of dead grass in your yard, gently rake them up. Check and see if these patches are due to [pests](#), such as chinch bugs, which often attack drought-stressed lawns.
2. Lower your mower blade – You’ve been [mowing](#) high all summer, right? (3” – about the height of a credit card), but now you can lower your blade to about 2 ½”, eventually lowering your blade to 2” for the final mowing. The reason for lowering the blade is to lower the risk of

molds and mildews on your grass, by making it easier for the grass to dry out in the shorter fall days.

3. Work on weed control – All summer you've left your grass clippings on the lawn for free nitrogen fertilizer. However, according to [Paul Tukey](#), if your yard has many weeds, you may consider collecting the grass clippings in your lawn mower's bagger, because weeds like plantain and crabgrass are sending out their seeds. He also recommends hand pulling weeds or spot treating the weeds with organic weed killers that have a vinegar base and are often mixed with clove oil or limejuice.

4. OVERSEED –From now until mid-October, this is THE time of year to put down grass seed. Grass seed applied in the fall will generally outcompete weeds because most weeds don't germinate in the fall, but grass seed flourishes.

Choose easy care grass seed

A blend of native turf-type fescues are a great choice for an easy care lawn. They are drought-tolerant, need little fertilizer and are slow growing. Great [fescue](#) seed blends are produced by the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association. You can also purchase [Pearl's Premium](#) grass seed from the North and South Rivers Watershed Association.

5. Topdress with 1/4" of compost - [Top dressing](#) with a 1/4" layer of compost is recommended particularly in the fall, as a soil amendment to improve your soils for healthy grass growth. Tim Gould, from [Agresource](#), explains why top dressing is one of the most valuable things you can do for your grass.

"Compost applications add organic matter to the soil. By increasing the soil organic matter, the ability of the soil to hold nutrients (cation

exchange rate) is enhanced. The addition of organic matter will facilitate plant growth and promote the establishment of a more dense vegetative cover further reducing opportunities for soil erosion. In addition as soil organic matter is increased soil is not only better able to hold water but also to absorb water after rain events."



Purple Berries in the Fall

From Risa Greenscapes consultant, landscape designer and renowned author of the blog, [Garden and the Good Life](#). Risa is also president of the [Ecological Landscaping Association](#).

"While I am always sad to head into the fall because it means winter is around the bend, some of my favorite plants show their beauty at this time of year. One of them is Purple Beautyberry or *Callicarpa dichotoma* and with its bright purple berries, it is a star in my garden. I just ordered and received the American native version, *Callicarpa americana* and will try that this year and see how it does."



(Also from Risa)

Prepare for the Winter Moth

If the winter moth is out again this season in large numbers, you'll want to call an arborist as soon as possible to ensure that you are on the list to get treated next season. My good friend Carl Brodeur, an arborist for 30+ years and one who practices organic land care ([NOFA](#) certified) told me that when the season hits, he gets so many calls that it is virtually impossible to handle them all. So don't wait until you see the damage next spring. Winter moths devour many trees and shrubs with maples, birches, crabs, apples, blueberries and cherries among their favorites. So if you have these types of trees, you'll need spraying. The organic approach is to spray them before bud break in the spring with a horticulture oil which essentially tries to smother these pests. Then, once the leaves start to unravel, you'll need to spray BT, a bacteria that gets ingested by these caterpillars and then kills them. Otherwise, they will completely defoliate your trees. This may not kill the trees this one time but if trees gets subjected to multiple stresses over time – pests, drought, etc. – they can eventually decline and die.

You can find a good summary of info at the [UMASS Extension site](#).

Greenscapes News from our Partners

The North and South Rivers Watershed Association recently completed a Greenscapes Water Challenge in four South Shore towns. Teams of 5 households competed to see which team could have the lowest water consumption between July 15 and September 30. The Water Challenge yielded several interesting results- it showed very clearly the impact that water irrigation or an undiscovered water leak can have on water consumption, making average daily water usage skyrocket. Most households averaged between 35-50 gallons per person per day, but the households with irrigation systems or undiscovered leaks (which the

Water Challenge unearthed) consumed more than 300 gallons per person per day!

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in partnership with the Connecticut River Watershed Council and Mass Water Watch Partnership are monitoring E.coli bacteria levels in the Connecticut River and its tributaries in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties as part of a larger effort to reduce nonpoint source pollution in the region. The project has been underway for three years and is currently funded by a MA DEP 604b ARRA grant. Data can be viewed at <http://www.umass.edu/tei/mwwp/ctrivermonitoring.html>. Lawn and landscape care is an important part of managing nonpoint source pollution, especially in largely residential areas. Free technical assistance is available to homeowners seeking to transition to organic land care. To learn more about this project and Greenscapes in the Connecticut River region, contact Anne Capra at acapra@pvpc.org.